

## 2. Neolithic Archaeology in North Korea

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*Received 25 October 1960*

The territory now controlled by the Korean People's Democratic Republic has been from early times in the history of eastern Asia a major cross-road through which movements of peoples and cultures were funnelled: from the Chinese heart-land to Japan or to the Siberian Pacific coast, as well as those from northern and central Asia to Japan. It closely adjoins the Vladivostok area, scene of important current Soviet excavations, and the little-known northeastern peripheries of the Chinese realm. Thus from many points of view it is an area which archæologists wish to know about, and yet there is probably no other area in the world of comparable importance so little known archæologically. While prehistoric research has forged ahead everywhere in the post-war years, North Korea has remained a blank spot—not because archæological work was at a standstill (as we have doubtless assumed), but due to isolation and lack of communication. Even our Soviet colleagues have no entrée there, and know the area only from the limited reports published in the Korean language. We can be grateful indeed that some of these have now been summarized in Soviet journals (Okladnikov and Kim 1958; To and Khvan 1959) enabling us to give the information that follows, although as a result of phonetic transliteration of place-names from Korean to Russian back to English makes difficult the precise identification of many localities on available maps.

No Palæolithic or Mesolithic remains have so far been uncovered in North Korea and it is the current view of the local authorities that the initial settlers possessed a fully-developed Neolithic culture. The primary economic base was hunting and fishing (both riverine and littoral), but the people also practised primitive farming and raised pigs. There were sizable permanent settlements of semi-subterranean houses. It is thought that the immigrants were drawn both from the Neolithic populations of the coastal areas of North China with its characteristic polished stone tools and from the Mongolia-Manchuria realm where 'microlithic' elements are conspicuous. Amalgamation of the immigrant groups resulted in a distinctive North Korean Neolithic combining disparate elements from these and other sources.

Major excavations have been carried out on Neolithic settlements in the city of Chendin (Nonfori Street site, 1956) and at the village of Di-Tap-Li 7 km. from Sariwon in North Hwanghae province (1957). The former site lies on a small hill which rises out of the Chendin valley. Exposure of the occupation levels by erosion led to its discovery and ultimate investigation by the local Chendin Historical Museum. Excavations were carried out at four points on the hill. The deepest accumulation was at Locality A on the southeastern slope, but this was composed of re-deposited material eroded from the hill top. The thinner deposit at Locality

B on the northeast slope was also redeposited, as was the 192 sq.m. of Locality C in the centre of the north slope. However, undisturbed shell midden and occupation levels were found at Locality D on the south slope which contained an abundance of stone, bone and ceramic materials but no trace of dwellings or even of hearths. 705 sq.m. were uncovered by the museum party; whether this refers to the entire site or only to Locality D is not clear.

The bulk of the finds consisted of chipped stone tools, with only a few ground stone artifacts. Flakes (chips) and un-retouched lamellar blades are especially numerous. Pressure-flaked bifacial flint arrowpoints occur in various forms, the most common are triangular with notched base. There are also end scrapers, knives, spear points and daggers; the latter are over 15 cm. in length, with the cutting edge slightly curved toward the end. Ground or polished tools include axes of rectangular outline with symmetrically convex cutting edge (often used secondarily as hammers or percussion flakers), arrowpoints, querns resembling those found in the northeastern tip of Korea, sinkers and grindstones. Bone remains comprised needles, awls, fishhooks, harpoons (fish spears?) and a stamp made of a boar's tusk for decorating pottery. Beads are of shell or large fish vertebrae. Of particular interest are the clay figurines which, we are told, have not hitherto been found in Korea. These include a headless anthropomorphic figure 6 cm. long with thick legs, wide hips and very narrow waist—undoubtedly a woman. The hands are crossed on the breast. Figurines of a dog and a bird are also mentioned. Pottery vessels were found but are not described.

Of still greater interest is the stratified site at Di-Tap-Li in the alluvial plain of the Chereng-Sokhyn River, where preliminary excavations were carried out in 1957 by To-Yu-Kho of the Institute of Archæology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Korean People's Democratic Republic. The site covers an extensive area and has so far only been sampled, but the presence of occupation levels of medieval, Han period and Neolithic age has been established. The latter lies at a depth of 1 to 1.5 m. under alluvial deposits. Part of the site is enclosed by a thick clay wall of medieval date. Excavations were carried out in two localities: the first inside this wall and the second 700 m. outside it on the bank of a stream tributary to the river.

The first excavation encountered an undisturbed Neolithic level at a depth of 1.2 m., with remains of a square semi-subterranean dwelling 7 m. by 7 m. and 50-70 cm. deep, having an entrance in the southeast corner (illustration: To and Khvan 1959). The walls had been coated with clay and there were traces of burned wooden posts. Around the slightly depressed hearth were large stones and 6 large pots for storing food. These pots were round-bottomed and decorated with dentate chevron and dentate striated designs. There were also other fragments of pottery, some with handles or lugs. (The illustrations in both sources show vessels with pointed egg-shaped or almost conical bottoms; one source mentions that some had flattened bases, and that asbestos temper was employed.) On the floor or in the fill of the house were querns and numerous other stone artifacts: arrowpoints, spear points, knives, axes, sinkers, grindstones, chisels (gouges?). Somewhat higher was a possible later Neolithic level containing fragments of a stone dagger imitating metal

forms and a semilunar slate knife, as well as some material of the foregoing types. The stratigraphy is not clear, however, and the distinction seems to be made primarily on typological grounds.

The second excavation uncovered two smaller semi-subterranean houses, square with rounded corners, 3 to 4 m. on a side and 0.4 m. to 0.6 m. deep, with central hearths (either of stones or thick clay) surrounded by post-holes and adjoining pits or pottery vessels set into the floor for storage. The entrance was on the south or southeast side, in one case with steps. The pottery all seems to have been decorated with a dentate instrument. In addition to the predominant chevron designs and striations as before there are also curvilinear wavy designs and pendant concentric arcs (see illustrations in sources). It must be noted that the discussion of pottery in To and Khvan is not always clear and consistent; we have included here only the data on which there seems to be general agreement between the sources. Stone artifacts include leaf-shaped polished arrowpoints (often with barbs)—some very long and narrow; polished spear points, querns, sinkers of two types, grindstones, three types of polished axe, sickles, and what are identified as stone ploughshares. This is the first occurrence of the latter two in Korea, according to the excavator. One of the axe types has a lenticular section and a bevelled cutting edge that sounds more like an adze; the other two have flat narrow sides and convex faces, giving a symmetrical longitudinal section—but in one case the cutting edge is bevelled (again suggesting an adze). Four specimens of sickles were found: they are described as having a convex back and a concave cutting edge sharpened from one side. No less than 30 of the unique stone ploughshares were recovered; the majority are 30 cm. long and 15 cm. wide, but some are as long as 65 cm. (examples are pictured in Okladnikov and Kim 1958, fig. 1b). Agriculture is also attested by carbonized grains of two varieties of millet found in a pot of dentate ware. Again, there was a suggestion of an overlying later level, perhaps Eneolithic: stone copies of metal daggers, star-shaped mace heads, fragments of 'stone money' (not further described), and absence of the characteristic Neolithic ceramic types. However, finds of this type are relatively few, and the stratum in which they occur is disturbed.

In addition to these two sites, a considerable amount of field work has been carried out in recent years in the northeastern corner of Korea, in the course of which some 50 Neolithic and Eneolithic sites have been located and excavations have been conducted, *inter alia*, on Tsodo Island (near Nadin) and at Odon (near Kheren). Our sources provide some generalized statements on the material recovered by these operations.

The usual type of chipped arrowpoint is triangular with a notch at the base; tanged points are very rare and seem too large to be used for arrows. The material is flint or chalcedony. There are also wide, flat, pressure-flaked blades, some tanged, that are probably knives although classified as spear points by the investigators. Polished arrowpoints occur commonly and in a variety of forms: narrow rectangular, elongated with round section, short and wide with tang, barbed with tang, etc. Polished slate daggers and spear points are widespread; one type is thought to be a harpoon point and has analogies in Formosa. Polished semilunar knives of slate have the cutting edge either on the convex or straight side, and often occur with drilled holes for hafting.

Of particular interest among the agricultural tools are the sickles found at Raksianli, which are curved with the cutting edge on the concave side, and lack holes. Rather crudely-made mattocks or hoes have been found at a number of places; these have shoulders and tangs. Several hundred querns have been found; in the majority of cases these are associated with polished slate objects.

Ground stone axes occur in a variety of forms: the most widespread have a rounded cross section and a cutting edge sharpened symmetrically from both sides. Long, narrow axes similar to those found in the Ryūkyū Islands are also conspicuous; one type of these has an oblique cutting edge (*vontonwu* type). Such forms are considered to have reached Korea from the south. The *Chusan-du* type of axe is massive and rectangular in section. There are also flat axes or adzes and plano-convex adzes.

In a category by themselves are the 'microlithic' elements which are found to be considerably more widespread in Korea than had formerly been thought. Flint microblades, points, notched blades, insert (side) blades for slotted tools—both notched and with serrated edge—are mentioned. The only cores referred to, however, are described as 'disc-shaped, analogous in form to Mousterian'.

From the discussion of pottery it may be deduced that wares with a smooth polished surface devoid of ornament are often found, and that decoration takes the form of dentate stamping, pits, incising and also painting. Painted pottery has monochrome designs in brown or black, sometimes on a yellow background. There is a separate category of black pottery, apparently with rather distinctive forms. Dentate pottery with chevron or herring-bone decoration is found all over Korea, but there are regional varieties of this. In the northwest (Gunsanli region) such ware has a thick round bottom and designs of parallel lines, punctations and pits. In the northeast there are stated to be no round-bottom vessels—apparently they are pointed—and the patterns are chevrons, meanders and circles. Other forms occur, such as high-necked vessels, cups with bases, jars, etc. but it is not clear with what wares they are associated.

Okladnikov has compared the materials from his investigations in the Vladivostok area with the descriptions of these North Korean finds and sees indisputable affinities pointing to close cultural links and the presence to a large extent of a common historical tradition in this general region. This view coincides with the culture area classification recently proposed by the present writer (Chard 1960). The North Korean sites with dentate chevron and meander design pottery Okladnikov feels are closely related to the Neolithic culture typified by the Gladkaia I site in the Soviet Maritime Territory; he also believes that the 'microlithic' elements belong here and do not represent any separate complex. The later Neolithic stage in North Korea has traits that also occur in sites of the Shell Mound period of the Vladivostok area: chipped stone is replaced by polished slate, querns are conspicuous, and there is a complete change in the appearance of the associated pottery, both in forms and decoration. The black pottery of North Korea also has direct analogies in later wares on Soviet territory, which are associated with the first appearance of iron. Thus the better known Soviet finds may be of considerable assistance to us in establishing a chronological framework for the Neolithic and Eneolithic of North Korea.

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